

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE WESTMINSTER SELECT BOARD

Wednesday, July 29, 2020

Westminster, VT – Outside Town Hall

Members Present: Susan Harlow, Chair, K. Sheldon Beebe, Vice Chair, Kevin Hughes, Clerk, and Toby Young.

Absent : Craig Allen

Others Present: Russell Hodgkins, Town Manager/Zoning Administrator

1. **Call to Order:** Susan Harlow called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. The meeting was held outside at the Historic Town Hall
2. **Adjustments to Agenda:** None
3. **Communications and Public Comments:** None
4. **New Business (Discussion/Action):**
 - A. Set “Interim” tax rate for September billing – The Town Manager started the conversation that it is his recommendation to hold off voting on this tax rate until mid to late August which would postpone the first tax bill due date to October 10th. This month lapse would possibly give the State of Vermont a chance to establish the education rate for the school district and hence give us our accurate tax rate numbers. He continued with, it is the recommendation of the NEMRC support team for the Town to wait this short time and print out only one accurate tax bill. The Manager read the email sent from NEMRC stating their opinion on the matter which could possibly involve borrowing to cover the expenses of the school district and fire district. Kevin Hughes asked what this amount would be and is there a risk to the Town. The Manager responded that half of the total amount needed would be two million dollars, but that would not be the amount needed to get them started. It would be half of that or even less. Mr. Hughes again asked about the risk the Town would be taking if we were to borrow this possible substantial amount. The Manager told the Board that he was confident that the taxpayers of Westminster, as a whole, would pay as usual and that by late October this loan could be paid off and the remaining dollars be transferred to the school and fire districts from taxes received. Kevin continued by asking about the loan vulnerability and who would be paying the interest from this loan. The Manager referred to the letter from NEMRC that he had just read earlier stating that the State of Vermont would be covering the loan interest for the Town because of COVID-19 this year. Kevin stated that he could not, in good faith, take out a loan in these unsure times when there is a viable option that would only cost the Town an additional \$4,000 +/- for a second billing. K. Sheldon Beebe asked what this loan would do to us if a major storm hit and/or disaster and if additional monies were needed to cover these costs. Will our borrowing capacity be at a maximum, he continued. The Town Manager replied that he would hope this would be seen as two separate borrowing needs and that the lending companies would take this under advisement. The Board bounced the pros and cons of setting the tax rate this evening versus waiting a month and it was finally decided to proceed with the billing as usual. K. Sheldon Beebe made a motion to set the “Interim” tax rate at \$2.4495 for the Homestead rate and \$2.3677 for the Non Homestead rate and send out the tax bills as soon as possible. Kevin Hughes seconded the motion. Susan Harlow asked if there was any further discussion needed before the vote and the Manager asked to take a few minutes to talk about how the proposed “Interim” tax rate was derived. He stated the education rate showed a 3% increase from last

year's final rate which was \$1.6904 for Homesteads versus the \$1.7420 proposed in this FY21 rate. Susan Harlow asked if this rate was safe as to cover costs. The Manager responded that this percentage (3%) was a best guess from what was told to the public by the school department who realistically has not a great handle on the bottom line as of yet because the State has not weighed in on the final calculations as it pertains to school population and per pupil expenses. The Manager continued, this rate would cover the costs for the first half year even if the State shows a huge deviation. Hearing no further discussion, the motion was voted on and it passed 4-0.

5. Other Business:

The Town Manager told the Board that we had an accident with a mini-split in the historic space at the Town Hall. A mud wasp nest was created in the drain tube of the center unit and it dumped water on top of the historic organ that was displayed under the new unit. He continued that he called Ruth Grandy and three members of the Historic Society came in to inspect the damage and determined, at first glance, that the unit is a total loss. The rest of the HS Board will review and determine the next steps for this organ. K. Sheldon Beebe said that screens should be placed on the ends of all of the drain tubes to prevent this from happening again. The TM will get it done.

6. Date of Next Meeting: The next regular meeting will be August 12, 2020 at 6:30 p.m.

7. Adjournment: Toby Young made a motion to adjourn at 7:26 p.m.. K. Sheldon Beebe seconded the motion and the motion passed.

Clerk

Date

Minutes prepared by Russell Hodgkins 7/30/2020
